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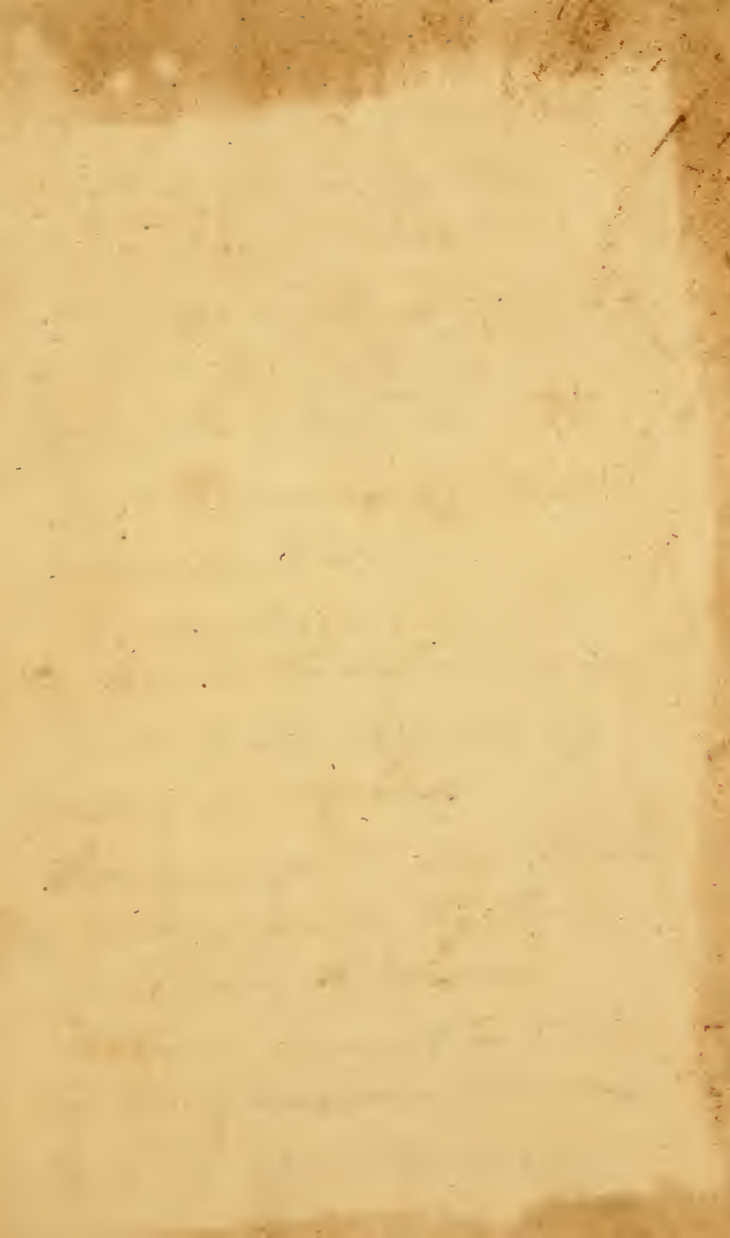
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THE
FAITHFUL STEWARD.

Being an impartial investigation of the subject:

IS THE CHURCH JUSTIFIABLE IN BAPTIZING ADULTS WITHOUT EVIDENCE OF THEIR FAITH AND REPENTANCE; AND IN BAPTIZING THE CHILDREN OF ANY PARENTS WHO DO NOT LIKEWISE GIVE EVIDENCE OF BEING THE SUBJECTS OF FAITH AND REPENTANCE?

By Archibald Cameron



Moreover it is required in Stewards that a man be found faithful. 1 Cor. v. 2.

For Sion's sake I will not keep silence; and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not rest, until her righteousness break forth as a strong light; and her salvation, like a blazing torch.

Isai. 62. 1.

LOWTH.

LOUISVILLE, (K.)

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PART I.

Is the Church justifiable in baptizing Adults without evidence of their faith and repentance; and in baptizing the children of any parents who do not likewise give evidence of being the subjects of faith and repentance?

AN important subject lies before me. I shall endeavor to judge of it, not from the practice of any, but from the principle which God has given in his word. The injury which has been done to society in the different æras of time, since a church existed in the world, by the improper administration of the ordinances of divine revelation, swells immensely upon the review. The practice, which seems to have been pursued by the ancient Jews, has in many instances been constituted into a rule of conduct, and made the basis of sentiment. What is this, but judging the excellence of revealed religion by the practice of its professors? A profane effort of infidelity; the absurdity of which has been frequently exposed. We should keep the principle given in any institution free from the practice of those who might corrupt the institution and depart from its first design. The admission of improper persons to divine ordinances, and the continuance of such in the enjoyment of them, after a discovery of error was, or might be made and a reformation was practicable, has caused the frowns of heaven to rest upon that society in proportion to the corruptness of its members, and the laxity which it indulged in admission to sacred privileges.

The great misfortune in this case is, that it frequently happens, the society boasts of numbers; but through blindness and partiality see not the sin, and apprehend not the punishment which awaits them. This is the case at this day with those propagators of party who are in the habits of receiving persons to the ordinance of baptism without making any distinction between the sacred and profane; and enrolling the names of the wicked among their proselytes, in order to en-

large their resources, and make a magnificent figure in the world.

The general practice which prevailed in the Jewish church, of admitting the profane to privileges, and the great omission in reference to the exclusion or cutting off those who did not exhibit a conversation declarative of the faith and godliness of Abraham, became a fruitful source of many evils: the idea of Abraham, as the father of the faithful, refers more to his example, and to him as a pattern, according to which the character who would obtain a stand in that church should be formed than to his natural relation to his posterity.

Beside the moral evil of the practice itself, it subjected them in a collective view to all the calamities of war and dispersion, desolation and captivity.* In the fiftieth Psalm you have the mind of God given in a very pointed manner upon this subject: the unsound professors, among the Jews, are represented as having made a covenant by sacrifice, having given into the external forms, while their heart was not in the business, and their life indicated a disaffection of mind to God. "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee."† God in this passage expressly disapprobates the assumption of the external forms of his covenant by those hypocritical and wicked Jews; and no man can be so vain as to suppose, that God would have persons admitted to those ordinances, which are expressions of his love, whom he prohibits by a sentence of condemnation.

Whenever the Jews exercised that faith, and employed that sincerity which was implied in the covenant made with Abraham, they were preserved from those judgments which followed them in their deviations: though God be "the great and dreadful God, he keeps covenant, and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments."‡ This doctrine seems to be abundantly implied in the 16th chapter of Leviticus, where the mercies and judgments which

* *Dan.* 9. 16. *Zecha.* 7. 13, 14.

† *Psal.* 50. 7—16, 17.

‡ *Dan.* 9. 4.

would fall upon the Jews, were announced to them by Moses, in a prophetic manner, according to the sincerity or corruptness which should obtain among them. It was owing to the multitudes of disqualified members, who swarmed in the Jewish church, that the instructions of the prophets in every age were rejected, and the reformation attempted by them was obstructed, even when the voice of nature corroborated that of the prophets, and proclaimed the true worship of God as proper and necessary in opposition to that of idols.

If none had been admitted to the privileges of the Jewish church in the age in which our Saviour lived, but those who maintained a piety suitable to the holy nature of the covenant made with Abraham, the world would not have witnessed in that society an envenomed and distracted multitude of the reputed worshipers of the living God, chief conspirators and perpetrators in the destruction of Jesus of Nazareth, in whose person and conduct were realized the whole assemblage of those virtues which the religion they themselves professed, taught them.

Had a spirited economy been observed in the Jewish church, according to the tenor of that covenant made with the Father of the faithful, the ignorant multitudes of unbelieving Jews would have stood upon their own ground, and of consequence would not be possessed of that invincible church pride which so effectually bared their minds against the instructions of Christ and his apostles.

Religion has always, in its vigorous exercise and revivals, met with its first attacks from those deadly professors whose only object was to be initiated into the church and obtain a stand in society. To assure us this description of persons were improper subjects of ordinances, Jesus Christ excluded from his church, in the gospel edition of it, the whole tribe of those pretenders who did not yield an obedience to the gospel, and thus prove that they had imbibed its principles. But, alas, shall the church glide into the same fault again after the dreadful consequences which have been experienced, and the striking evidence which it had of the impropriety of the measure, in the obstructions which true religion experienced under the Jewish dispensation, and in the instance of publishing the tidings of great joy? Lamentable consequences recognize the fact!

During the three first centuries, when the church was the object of special persecution, men of corrupt minds seemed in a good measure to have been precluded from obtruding themselves upon her; religion having not yet become a matter of vain ostentation, or an object of lucrative view, the church observed great care and particularity in the admission of her members. This may be learned by referring to the principal writers of that time. The famous ORIGEN, in writing against CELSUS, in behalf of christianity, speaks in the following manner: "We do our utmost that our congregations be composed of good prudent men—so that none who are admitted to our congregations & prayers, are vicious & wicked except very rarely it happen that some bad men may be found hidden in so great a number."*

Catechumens

Those persons who professed their design to relinquish heathenism and idolatry, and desired to become members of the christian church, were not immediately received to baptism, but were continued some time "as Catechumens," or persons under instruction, with a view to admission into the society.

This method was observed toward them for two reasons: 1st. That they might become acquainted with the doctrine of the christian faith; and 2dly. That they might give demonstration of the reality of their intention by the change of their lives, and the holiness of their conversation.

This description of persons, when in the church, stood in a place by themselves, and attended sermons which were adapted to their capacities. being discourses upon the plainer truths of the gospel.† When they had sufficiently progressed in knowledge, and were established in behaviour, they were advanced to the gradation of the perfecti, which means a more accomplished degree of knowledge, and a more approved conversation. After some short time they were baptized, and engaged with the faithful in celebrating the Eucharist or the Lord's supper.

From the preceding representation, it appears the church had not yet learned to administer baptism, or any other church

* *Origen contra Celsum. Lib. 3. p. 143 & Lib. p. 178.*

† *Origen contra Celsum. Lib. 3. p. 172. 143.*

privilege to grown persons without evidence of their religion. I mention grown persons because the church was then in the practice of baptising the infants of those Pagans converted to christianity, to whose persons baptism was administered, upon the principle of their relation to faithful parents, who should teach them, and bring them up in the ways of godliness.

But soon did this fidelity to the Great Head of the church fail; soon was the temple of God crowded with worldly minded priests, and soon did society become a group of carnal, unprincipled professors, who distinguished not between the sacred and profane. These priests instead of requiring real evidence of a change of nature in the character of professors, made a bare submission to mere ordinances, the distinguishing marks of christianity. In process of time the whole mass of the reputed followers of Christ were leavened with the leaven of the ancient Pharisees: the society of christians assumed the same configuration which characterised the Jewish church at the introduction of the gospel, and employed the same spirit which the ancient posterity of Abraham did against those good men who attempted the reformation of the church and the reinstatement of gospel truth.

The justness of this representation you find realized in the treatment which the illustrious Saxon Godeschalcus received from the blind bishops of his day. He lived about the middle of the ninth century, was a profound student of divinity, whose erudition, natural parts, and piety, would establish his praises in the churches; yet because he taught some doctrines which the pride of man hates, though very distinguishable in the scriptures, and though they constitute some of its most prominent features, he became a victim of ecclesiastic persecution, was whipped with the utmost severity, and to preclude his influence from society his life was exterminated in the dreary recesses of a dungeon. He retained his sentiments, and the magnanimity of his soul remained firm unto the last.* He still believed the superintendence of divine Providence, and with Paul, that God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will—that God does not begin to determine upon the justification of the sinner after he converts himself; but that the divine mind acted as well upon the case of the believer before

* II volume of Mosheim's Eccles. hist. p. 334, 335, 336.

time, as after his conversion—that before time had an existence, or this world, God chose some of mortal race that they should be holy; having predestinated them to the adoption of children, (not according to the will of the flesh) but according to the good pleasure of his own will and to the praise of the glory of his grace.”*

Had divine grace formed and regulated the temper of the christian church at that time, she would not have admitted or retained in communion such a herd of anti-scriptural professors and ecclesiastics; she would have spued them out of her mouth, and have erected the colours of Christ Jesus and his twelve apostles; but instead of that, her baptism and her other ordinances were free to the enemies of the cross of Christ, who stood ready with weapons in their hands for the destruction of those persons who should believe, profess, and practice according to “the faith once delivered to the saints.” Hence Jerome of Prague, Wickliff and the pious Waldenses, were the unfortunate victims of her ghostly fury.

The notion that Christ died for the guilt and sinfulness, which were derived by our race from the fall of Adam, in such manner that the whole moral system of human nature was somehow affected by it; that through our baptism all our guilt and sinfulness are obliterated, and that then we stand before God in the primitive state of Adam, confined the notion of regeneration to the mere act of baptism whether administered to infants or to adults. Thus the gross Romanist knew no other regeneration than baptism founded upon the principle of this general effect of the death of Christ upon all the human family; of course they required not the visible evidence of a renewal of the persons heart who was received, or continued in their communion: all, according to their principles, had a real right to baptism. To this effect they apply Paul’s words: “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,”† forgetting that the scriptures recognize no way of becoming interested in the death of Christ, but by faith in him, and that the apostle was speaking here of the happy resurrection of believers in Christ.

This Romanistic principle is practised upon by many who boast of life and reformation at this day in our country. But

* 1 pb. 1. 4, 5, 6.

† 1 Cor. 15. 22.

is it not absurd when men draw their arguments in favor of infant baptism, from the faith of parents, as giving their children a right to baptism, that they should deviate from their own fundamental principles? If the right of infants to baptism be thus pleaded from the real interest which their parents have in the stipulations of God's economy of grace, I cannot see how upon principles of common sense, the children of the profane, or mere pretenders to the christian name, who do not give evidence of faith and repentance, can be admitted to baptism. I can easily see how time-servers might by this mean humour the folly of the self, the deceived, who place religion in mere ordinances, and are not at all solicitous about feeling the life and power of it; but how gospel ministers can do so whose business it should be to apply those declarations of exclusion, which are made in divine revelation, is a thing for which I cannot account, without resolving it into the great mystery of iniquity.

We do not plead for the baptism of infants from the covenant made with Adam; but from the covenant made with Abraham, and because they are the children of believers.

If the notion that the death of Christ has so cancelled original guilt, and wiped off the contaminating stain of sin from human nature, that without any distinction the whole race of Adam stand justified and of consequence regenerated, till they have committed some actual sin, lays a foundation for the right of children to baptism, why is any other right pleaded by those people for the baptism of either infants or adults? According to this notion, if you prove that a being is merely human, you have a sufficient warrant for his baptism. Christ's suffering in human nature becomes his qualification without respect to faith, to give a title to baptism. The believer in this view has no preference to the unbeliever. The whole doctrine of baptism is reduced to an insignificant and pitiful nonsense, and the privilege of the church made a common thing.

I am astonished when I see men in the pertness of their folly, step forward in the open view of mankind, to justify a thing which is evidently marked with all the signs of a counterfeit. It cannot bear the light of investigation; it suits better in the tavern than in the church, in the darkness of night than in the visibility of day. Yet we find a whole caravan of prea-

chers employed in baptising the children of persons who have no just appearance of religion in their life, unless you consider the act of coming forth to baptism such appearance; and likewise baptising adults who have nothing to say for their religion only they are willing to submit to baptism. Such persons may say that it is not their avowed practice to introduce unconverted adults into their church; whatever persons may have avowed upon this subject, we see such baptisms frequently taking place, and the reception of adults into the church seems to be necessarily connected with the baptism of them. But an ambiguous character will be brought forward as a proper subject of baptism, or a substitute for a converted person: that is, such as have "a desire to flee from the wrath to come." The state of the person's mind who is here meant, seems to be what is commonly called conviction of sin; if it be any thing more than conviction, I cannot conceive what that may be short of faith, and in that case the subject is not in a questionable situation. The mind must be either converted or unconverted: there is no stage between the two. As to conviction of sin and the dread of evil they are natural to the mind of man when thoughtful & apprehensive respecting future things, and the possibility of an awful destiny. There is no virtue or religion in them; the devil possesses more conviction than any of the sons of mortality.

But here we may be favored with an interrogatory statement by some masterly hand: *What, do you call unconverted and even unawakened persons, now grown to years of discretion who were received into the church in their infancy?* This inquiry has a formidable aspect. Alas, how profound the argument! Who is able to solve the difficulty, or stand before such a weight of reasoning? But as writers upon the subject of baptism, I would advise gentlemen to make themselves acquainted with the strong ground of which they ought to take possession, least when reasoning with those who deny the propriety of infant baptism, they have to give up the point in consequence of their own premises. If baptism were pleaded for infants, in consequence of any supposed fitness in themselves, distinct from the faith and religion of their parents, I confess I should not be able with a good conscience to open my mouth in favor of it: for certainly the word of God would not justify me in so doing. The best writers upon the subject of infant or household baptism cheerfully agree in argumentation

with the Baptist brethren, that faith and repentance are necessary qualifications prior to baptism in persons who are received in mature age, or at such an age as admits of a profession; but they plead from different principles that the infants, or house-holds of such as are believers, may be received thro' them to baptism.* Yet they do not plead for the baptism of any others, neither can they do it by the use of just principles or inference from the subject. Infants are received as scholars; and all the scriptures respecting the business go to prove the necessity of real religion in those who act as their parents. Persons are not admissible to privileges in the church on account of their infant baptism; no: that may be the way of some who want a pretext for admission to ordinances without religion; but it is not the plan of conduct sanctioned in the word of God.

Some one here again may interpose and put this masterly query: *Would not proselytes of the gate obtain circumcision for their children under the Jewish dispensation should they have offered them?* I answer no: the privilege would certainly have been denied them, had the scriptures been taken for the rule of direction. It is well known that the uncircumcised male was to be cut off from among God's people, and that when the male-head represented the family in minority, the child could not be circumcised but through the parent, neither could he in that case be circumcised before the parent, because he partook of the same uncleanness, and stood at the same awful distance from the church of God with the father, who until he should be circumcised had neither lot, nor part in the matter. Let it be remembered that persons are not to draw conclusions from their own questions unless they be attended with matter of evidence.

But suppose now it were lawful for the Jews to circumcise children in such a situation, that would prove nothing as to the baptism of unbelievers and profane persons. It may be considered a parallel case to the baptism of a Quaker's children, who is a believer, but declines his own personal baptism, and it would be a very good argument in that case; but I do not see that it can apply in any other way to the subject.

* See Peter Edwards, Graham and Hemmenway, upon baptism.

Again, suppose the Jews did circumcise the children of those parents who were profelytes only of the gate, that would not prove the legality or propriety of it more than the practice of Dean Swift or Sterne, would justify the administration of baptism to the unconverted and the profane. We find very general complaints made against the Jews, by the prophets, for profaning the ordinances of God. But by what record is this kind of circumcision proven? Not by the Bible, or any authentic record, I am sure. It is the lawless rant of conjecture. Cornelius was a profelyte of the gate and a very devout man; yet we find a miracle wrought to convince Peter of the lawfulness of visiting his house to preach the gospel to him and to his family: all such persons were counted unclean, and the Jews had no religious intercourse with them, for which the voice said to Peter, "What God hath cleansed that call not thou common."* How could the children be circumcised when the parents did not realize an obligation to be circumcised themselves? "This kind," says (Mede,) "were still esteemed Gentiles, and so called, because of their uncircumcision, in respect whereof (though they were no idolators) they were according to the law unclean, and such as no Jew might converse with; wherefore they came not to worship in the sacred courts of the temple whither the Jews and circumcised profelytes came."†

The present practice of the Jews, in this case, is as follows: If any person has a mind to be made a Jew, he must first be examined by their Rabbins, or other persons in authority; they then take and circumcise him; and as soon as he is well of his sore, he is to wash himself all over in water.‡

Arminian wisdom will furnish us with another conclusive query upon this subject: "Do believing parents always have elect children? If not by what authority does a Calvinist baptize a little reprobate in the name of Christ?" Some vain speculators with a view to baffle the objects of their repugnancy once proposed this question: "Where did Jehovah dwell e'er the heavens and earth were made?" It was answered: "He dwelt where e'er the heavens & earth obeyed his

* Acts. 10. 15.

† Mede's works. page 19.

‡ See Booth on Baptism. Vol. 2. p. 175.

Mighty Call, & he made a hall for those who propose idle questions & impossibilities." Here it might be enquired: Is the omniscience of God, with regard to future events, the rule of our duty? or, is the revelation which he has made for our instruction and direction, regarded as a rule? If the first, God should have made us omniscient as well as himself; and if the last, references to God's omniscience and future events are idle and impertinent. That God whose knowledge is conversant about things which he has determined to bring into existence, and whose knowledge of things is regulated by the mode of his own determination; and that Redeemer who knows whom he has chosen can ascertain this matter with perfect precision. The direction of scripture is the rule of my conduct; election is the object of my belief; and though I am of opinion that God determines and acts upon his own determinations, that does not require that I should look for any other revelation from him, for my direction, beside that which he has given to his creatures in this lower world already, who are all accountable upon the principles of duty.

But suppose election depended upon the fore sight of a number of good things which a person would do, and a quantity of good qualities, which the person would work up in himself by mere reflection and diligence of soul, as faith, repentance, and love to God and man, the election of the infant would be as much a secret from the baptiser upon that plan, as when you suppose election to rest in the free choice of God, without being first merited, or induced by a number of good qualities foreseen. Therefore, election upon the Calvinistic plan, is no greater obstacle in the baptism of a converted man's children, than election upon the plan of the Arminians. But what is meant by this mock phrase, "Little reprobate?" Is it intended to intimate that the posterity of Adam, in infantile age, are not reprobate by nature? In what state then do we find them? They must be either in a state of depravity and guilt, or else in a state of purity and innocence. If in a state of depravity and guilt, then, they are reprobates by nature: a reprobate is a person, lost to virtue, or lost to gracious qualities; but if they be in a state of purity and innocence, there is no occasion for being offended with any one, who under that view, may compare them to a sheet of clean paper. And if those persons who talk so much about the good state of infants, do not mean their innocence and moral purity, they had

better talk intelligibly and get released from the deceptions of their favorite controversial writers.

Will it be said that all infants have something of the spirit of grace or holiness, through Christ, and that they are justified? In that case they must be born again; otherwise they cannot see the kingdom of God. But my mind is not yet released from difficulty: I see nothing in those young creatures as soon as they are capable of discovering the workings of their heart, beside a wicked and a foolish human nature. But I now recollect: they are fallen from grace. Yet it is very surprising that they are all fallen from grace! It is a weak and unavailing kind of grace indeed, that has no effect upon the heart of the possessor of it! And though it cannot preserve the soul from the dominion of sin, and the ruin which is consequent; yet it could save the soul in infancy, it could impart heavenly qualification, and never did it; it could exist in the heart, and its effects never be perceivable. This philosophy of the human mind I must discard: I cannot make it hang together.

I rather adopt the opinion, that all the human race, even in infancy, are depraved, and liable to condemnation; that God may apply the healing efficacy of the gospel to infants in a way with which we are not acquainted; and that all who die in infancy may be regenerated, justified and saved. Yet, though they may be thus saved, God is not bound upon principles of justice to save them; neither have we any assurance from the stipulations of the gospel, that they shall be saved. On the other hand, no man is warranted to say, that they shall be damned, or that any one of them shall be damned; & though I have often heard it charged upon that rusty people, called Calvinists, that they hold there are infants in hell not a span long, I never heard any of them speak upon the subject so rash, and so foolish.

When it is conceded, that "man is of his own nature, inclined to evil, and that, continually," I hope that no person will think it unjust in God to leave such creature subject to the native condemnation of his own guilt. Though God may choose to do an act of mercy, should he omit it upon principles of justice, his throne is guiltless.

If persons be persuaded that they act lawfully in admitting those adults who do not give evidence of real religion to bap-

tism, they ought to say so, and not to equivocate upon the subject : simplicity in the practice of sin is not so disgusting as intriguing criminality. If either travelling or stationary preachers justify themselves in this loose way of baptism because they multiply their profelytes, and attach a number to their party in consequence, whose attention would not be turned upon them were it not for this compliment, they have their reward ; but it is the reward of Pharisees : “ Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ; for ye compass sea and land to make one profelyte, and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves.”*

In the reformation from Popery, the necessary distinctions upon this subject were in a good measure realised, as will appear from the various writings of the Protestants in the Netherlands, in Germany, in Switzerland, and in Britain ; no doubt the practice was very deficient in this case as well as in all others : as the Israelites of old ever shewed a propension of nature to depart from the worship of God, to that of idols, so the reformed churches through the corruptions of human nature, and the mists which followed them from the church of Rome were ever inclinable to depart from the principles of divine revelation. In that proportion in which the churches had been lax in the admission of graceless pretenders into them, and in vesting persons of no religion, and who were ignorant, with the office of the gospel ministry, the glorious presence of God departed from them : and what will not men do when left to the direction of their own nature ?

The Rubric of the church of England sufficiently proves that they considered those who represented children in baptism to be real christians themselves ; therefore they address them as such : they are spoken to as possessing all the qualifications of those who enjoy the cultivation of the Holy Ghost. Yet how reverse is the practice of a multitude in that church in the administration of baptism ? But we cannot in this blame their articles : they are living witnesses that they have wofully departed from their original ground. Is the doctrine which that church holds evangelical ? Yes. Why then do so many of her parsons dishonor her by that unchristian practice of complimenting away her baptism, and other ordinances upon the

* *Matth.* 23. 15.

irreligious clown, the dry impenitent legalist, the sceptic and even the debauchee? It arises from the corruptness of her clergy and her professors; but many are excepted: *by their fruits ye shall know them.* Lift up your eyes, and behold the desolations of that church through the State of Virginia; her ordinances have been prostituted and her walls are in consequence broken down.

The Methodist church with respect to the administration of baptism, tread in the same dirty paths as the corrupt part of the church of England. I am told, indeed, that some of that society are of opinion, baptism should be confined to believers and their children; how great the proportion I know not; but I incline to think they are few, as I have heard of their preachers frequently offering arguments in favor of the administration of baptism to the children of those who are not converted, and it is their general practice not to baptize the households of a believing jailor, or a Lydia only; but, also, the households of graceless mortals who neither fear God nor regard man; nor yet deny the vanities of this world. The increase of a society is no matter of boast when they who are employed in proselyting can admit into their catalogue those who have not the real gospel qualification of a christian, but only a predilection in favor of a certain form of sentiment; and it is easy to clamor sentiments into the mind of an injudicious sinner who is gaping for some place of rest in society without just apprehensions of his God, or the plan of salvation.

Under the general name of Presbyterian, I find a great many whose religion is a mere echo. Many of the transatlantic made-professors and no small number of those who are made on this side the ocean, are enemies to the cross of Christ—*are enemies to the just impressions which the gospel should make upon the heart of sinners and the effect which it should have upon their conduct.*

By reason of the loose and inconsiderate practice of some in the administration of baptism, great difficulty is devolved upon the hands of those who limit their conduct in this case by the restriction of the word of God, and who are actuated by its just principles. Many who would be mortified at the thoughts of their exclusion, and stimulated to prepare themselves for the

approbation of the church, and consequently the approbation of their God, are settled down in their security by a reception to the ordinances of the church, and their rejection becomes the occasion of rooted antipathy against those who treated them with honesty, and according to the principles of divine revelation.

I have known frequent instances of persons who were rejected upon application for baptism to their children, because they themselves seemed not to be the subjects of a living faith, and a gospel repentance, make a pretence that they could not agree with our church in sentiment, and obtain that privilege of the Methodists or the church of England, or that they were conscientious about singing of hymns, and upon the notion of their orthodoxy received to that ordinance by some of the Seceders.

I have nothing to say against the good people of the Secession: I love and respect them so far as they are employed in rectifying society—so far as they act in consonance with our common Confession, which we conceive is a summary of scripture doctrine, and to which that people gloriously profess to bear witness; but it is a stubborn, and undeniable fact, that a great many who attach themselves to that society in this country, and I believe in different parts of America, are destitute of all appearance of real and experimental piety. They talk with as much wildness on the subject as the illiterate clown does about the Newtonian philosophy.

There are many up and down of this description within the limits of the Presbyterian church; but I cannot tell how they have gotten into it, nor how they are retained: I am sure it is not in conformity with our tenets. The enemy indeed sows tares, and we cannot boast of our prudence, knowledge and precaution in any case; but I am afraid that the degree of distinction is not made at all times by the door-keepers of Christ's inclosures which the information they possess admits. They allow the poisonous goat too voluntarily to graze upon the pastures allotted for the sheep.

Some make shipwreck of their religious character, and are obnoxious to the frowns of society; they then set out like Noah's raven, and employ all their shifts and fondling strata-

gem ; and by making compliments of divine ordinances they after a while huddle around themselves such as were disaffected, and such as place religion in names and ordinances.

Baptism is dispensed by some in the same manner that in countries where publications are usual, broken priests and parsons are employed for the purpose of celebrating clandestine marriages. Those people who are not disposed cordially to observe the requirements of the gospel, and wish to obtain church privilege can easily determine how they will get into the good graces of those most kind, most benevolent, and most liberal men. We have seen men who in most things are inflexible as the sturdy oak in the forest, in this case pliant as the limber willow.

This is as contrary to the doctrine of our church as it is to the scripture. The confession says, " Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized."* The catechisms speak the same sentiments : " To whom is baptism to be administered ?"†

Answer. " Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized."

This profession is undoubtedly such an expression of the real state of our mind both by the language of our lips, and the actions of our life, as will serve to excite the just opinion of the church, that we are born again, and that we are actuated by divine grace. A profession which does not imply a true repentance and the renovation of our heart is by no means a profession of faith in Christ.

The obedience of which the Confession speaks is an actual life of obedience already in existence to the gospel of Christ. It is not a mere assertion made by a person, that he has faith in Christ, and promises that he will live in obedience to the gospel in future : No, that is not it.

* *Confess. Ch 28. 4.*

† *Cat. Quest. 98.*

The Catechism beautifully coincides with the scripture where it says, that with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, & with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* Our Saviour speaks of this profession when he says, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your father who is in heaven."†

This is the profession which will enable us with a good face to claim the privileges of the gospel. This is the confession and profession for which the church should look, in admitting to the privilege of baptism.

When but one of the parents is a believer, the children are admitted to baptism; which serves to shew that according to the Confession, if one or both of them do not give evidence of their faith there is no admission to baptism. As to the case of the children when grown to the time of reflection, and improvement, if they do not realize in their life the requirements of the gospel, they hear not the voice of the church and are to be deemed as heathen-men and publicans.

We admit them because we think it is the counsel of heaven; not because it is the policy of our church. If we did not admit the household of believers to baptism, the economy of the church would not be so difficult; but we are not to consult our own ease and pleasure in the management of God's house, but what we conceive to be the instructions of heaven. Is it not shameful, and criminal in any of those ministers and church sessions who profess to regulate their practice by the Westminster Confession of faith, to admit to baptism those persons who evidence to the world, that they are not the friends, but rather the enemies of the holy religion of Jesus? That this in some instances is the case is as proper to announce as it was in the sacred historian to animadvert upon the crimes of David and Solomon.

Though we cannot pretend to be perfect judges of the real religion of persons, when employing the greatest sincerity and care; yet we may be such judges as not to receive into the bosom of the church those who do not wear even the colours

* *Rom.* 10. 10.

† *Matth.* 5. 16.

of religion in their vestments. Are there not some servants employed in the church who are so unfaithful that they mantle themselves around with a voluntary and an affected ignorance of the condition of those they admit to its privileges, & for this reason they affect there is an impropriety in man's making any inquiry into the state of the heart. They desire it should be so, that they might stand behind this paper wall, and use it as an apology for themselves in introducing so many irregular, and profane persons to the communion or retaining them in it. It would seem they think it indifferent whether their fig-trees bear fruit or only leaves, so they can sit under their shade, and defend themselves from a burning sun.

They say it is the part of God to judge the heart; they cannot think of this when they use such hard speeches respecting some of their neighbors; they can judge of their heart and religion too sometimes without much deliberation.

But who pretends to judge of the heart? We judge of the language which the person says is that of his heart; we judge of the expression which the person makes of the exercise of grace in his heart; we judge of his conversation; his fruit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

Men are bound by the authority of scripture "To be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh the reason of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear."† Who can presume it is not a duty to give an account of the exercise of faith and repentance to the church, if individuals are to be gratified with reasons of our hope? If the pastor of a people have no recourse to their heart which is only to be gotten by free conversation with them, how is he to be directed in the accommodation of his discourses to their case? How is the medicine of the gospel to be applied when it is not known what the particular complaints of the heart are? Why should a person make a secret of the work of the spirit in his heart? The effects of it in the life of christians must be visible as the candle in an open place, or a city upon an hill. The greater part of the Psalms, and a great deal of other scripture, are declarations of the work of grace in the heart.

* 1 Cor. 2. 13, 14.

† 1 Peter. 3. 15.

It is not sufficient that a man have knowledge: there may be knowledge without grace. The judgment may be correct, though the heart be depraved, and the will obstinate. Let no man do evil for his. God requires all his stewards to execute their office according to his sacred oracles.

Let it be observed that I do not restrict the fault of corrupting the church to those who are in the practice of Pedobaptism: those who practice only adult baptism are intitled to a share in this criminal business: there is no injury to be received by society from infants, or persons in a state of minority, who are taken into the arms of the church while their minds are flexible, and susceptible of gospel impression, considering that at that time they have no rule, and are in a manner passive to the guardianship of the church.

It is admitted that under the purest intentions society may receive bad members unawares. The fault lies in not cutting off those who give evidence of their disqualified state of mind for being useful and faithful members of the society.

I am induced to believe that there is a multitude of rotten members in the baptist church at this day; many ignorant and unprincipled persons, who have nothing to plead in favor of their religion, but an obsolete experience, consisting of a little transient conviction, some imaginary views, and a little joy, resulting from the notion of their acceptance with God. Let not the Baptist think that I am casting any reflections upon the fundamental principles of his church: that is not my object. I believe there are many valuable christians, in that society, who abominate false religion, and are using their endeavours to engage their fellow-creatures in the love and service of God. Yet I think that many have crowded into it with a very superficial stock of religion indeed, and that it has great need of purging at this time.

A relation of some exercise of mind, which bears but a shadowy resemblance to that of the new creature, passes with many of them for a great experience of grace, just because it is a copy of their own feelings, or apprehensions, when they have not charity enough to admit the religion of persons who do not observe their mode of baptism, whose life and conversation give every proof of their regard to the divine law, and the existence of a living faith in their heart.

It seems to be a folly of this kind of which the apostle takes notice, in some of the Corinthians when he says: "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise."* We cannot limit the divine spirit in the work of conversion: no cant notion of an experience should pass for an evidence of grace.

When we find, indeed, that the work of faith and repentance, has been wrought in a man's heart, and that real principles of holiness actuate his mind, of which we may judge partly from his conversation, and partly from his conduct, we are then authorized to receive him as a brother in the faith.

That high approbation which I have some times heard pronounced upon persons, who gave but very little proof of their religion; that flattering reception met with by a whole society of supposed saints and judges, is just calculated to beguile the incautious mind into a state of vanity, and lull it fast asleep in the security of sin.

The real character of a christian, and the proper notion of faith and conversion, as derived from the word of God, may, in continuance of time, be so entirely lost from that society, by the influence of an ungodly majority who may get into it, that it will be converted into a synagogue of satan: the majority of any society, especially when they are equal in individual power, bear the sway. In that society where all decisions in council of any kind—and in the reception and the exclusion of their members, are made by the greater number of votes, where the ignorant and the knowing; the wise and the unwise; the bond and the free; the male and the female; the young and the old, have all an equal and promiscuous influence in government, the features of democracy are too strong to promise preservation of purity, order and regularity. Clashing passions will frustrate the best concerted plan, and drive the wheels of government from the proper line of direction.

There are some of that society of opinion, that a mere declaration of assent to the christian faith, is a sufficient ground

* 2 Cor. 10. 12.

for admission to baptism. Should so great a number obtain entrance into that church, as would decide the balance of influence in favor of those who affect not the exercise of grace in the heart & who would feel friendly to so free a plan of admission of members; should in the mean time, the tide of their popularity run high for a few years, they would become a huge and formidable mass of the most violent bigots. Let this society take care then lest the pride of their heart shall have deceived them,* and the multitudes of their believers prove to be billows dashed upon the shore.

Impressed with these views of the state of religious society, nothing can release the reflective mind, from the deepest despondency, but the sure promise of that prophet whose words cannot fail: "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."†

A REFLECTION.

MEN who are not pleased with the christian religion, who choose to disavow its authority, and discredit its truth, generally expatiate upon the faults of the members of religious society, and the mischiefs to which their bad conduct has given occasion; they draw conclusions hence unfavorable to the truths of divine revelation, and the rules which it contains for the direction of those who profess to believe it; but there is no just reason in the philosophy of nature, or of morals, for those conclusions of infidelity respecting the christian religion. The variegated condition, the vicissitudes, the declines, and corruption which sometimes mark ecclesiastic council, are not attributable to the Author of our Holy Religion, nor to the system which he taught. Those errors of sentiment, and wild effusions of fancy which sometimes deluge thousands in folly and wickedness, and threaten the total desolation of the temple of christianity, are owing to the depravity and imperfection of those beings of which the church is composed, and the trying nature of an earthly state of existence.

It is no strange thing to a philosophic mind, that an interference of the divine spirit should be necessary to preserve mo-

* *Obad. 3.*

† *Matth. 16. 18.*

ral agents from sin and extravagance: though the laws by which the material world is actuated, are perfect and adequate to the purpose for which they were established, the free motion of those bodies which are directed by them in open space, may be retarded by a resisting medium or diverted from their proper course of direction.

Thus the material system might be disordered and thrown into wild confusion, if the infinite wisdom and the omnipotent hand of God were not employed by an interference which perpetuates regular and progressive motion. From the slowest progress of vegetation to the most rapid velocity of the blazing comet, the God of nature must hold the laws of nature in his hand for the purpose of preserving the regular advance and tendency of vegetative being, and the true motion of revolving worlds.

The moral world which is not impelled by mechanical laws; but governed by causes which have no power to coerce an action without a consent of mind, may much more easily be disordered, especially that part of the moral world which is comprised in human existence; the most native tendency of which is in a course of departure from the laws which should regulate its actions: the objects which it meets, and the circumstances with which it is connected, are all calculated to divert it from that line of conduct prescribed, and which is proper to be pursued. It would seem then that the kind attention of Providence, the adjusting and disposing influence of the spirit of God in the heart of moral beings, are indispensibly necessary to guide them in the way of truth and rectitude, and to preserve them from those deviations to which even the righteous are liable.

PART II.

I SHALL now proceed to a direct and to a closer view of the subject, upon which I shall not hesitate a moment, to pronounce the indispensable necessity of the evidence of a gospel faith and repentance in the case of all those who apply for baptism either for themselves or their households. Whatever may be said of the conciliating effects of administering baptism to irreligious persons, and the advantages they may derive from being well affected toward those who preach the gospel, is nothing when we recollect this is not a gospel maxim : " Let us do evil, that good may come."

The qualifications which are necessary in adult persons to procure a place in the church of Christ, and of course a right to their own personal baptism, are equally expedient to give them a right for baptism to their children : it is absurd when the childrens right comes through the parents, to suppose that the children have a right to baptism, when the parents have none. From which it may certainly be concluded, that if special saving-grace be required in adult persons, as qualifying them for baptism, the same is requisite for all parents whose children are admitted to baptism. Let it then be observed, that what may have been or shall be advanced to shew that real religion of heart in the sight of God, and the evidence of it in the sight of the church, is necessary as a qualification for baptism in those persons who are capable of making a profession, is to our purpose.

When God expresses his will in any dispensations toward his creatures, he never counteracts the perfections of his nature ; and having the idea of perfect truth and faithfulness as being attributes of the Divine Being, we can never doubt the conformity of his conduct to these perfections : in any exhibition of his favor or discovering of his will, we must form our notion of his intention from the signs by which he communicates it.

Baptism is an ordinance of divine appointment, to be administered, not only as a sign of admission into the church of Christ, but as a sign and seal of faith with all its attendant graces; and as a pledge of those spiritual blessings which are hid in Christ for the believer. Now when the mind of a person is in such a state of maturity as to be capable of making inferences and of being immediately by those inferences made from God's ordinances, affected according to their meaning, it cannot be consistent with the will of God to administer the ordinance of baptism to those whose minds are not the subjects of qualifications which it implies. This would excite confidence and hope upon a fallible ground; it would be a deception imposed upon the creature, to give him a token of properties which are requisite for his salvation of which he is not possessed. From the nature of the ordinance, and the truth and faithfulness of God then, it would seem improper to administer baptism to an unregenerate man: God does not speak to him in the friendly language of this institution: "He is angry with such every day."*

God is very express throughout the Scriptures in acquainting men with their standing in his sight, and the condition upon which they can be accepted to his favor. The Divine Author of the Scriptures designs that we should make a proper estimate of ourselves and others; and that in this we should never place ourselves or others in any relation to God which does not meet with the approbation of the sacred oracles. To this purpose we have a large and particular account of the qualifications of christians and rules, by which we may judge in whom these qualifications are implanted. As the gates of heaven are bared against all those who have not these qualifications, it is fairly presumable an admission to sealing ordinances should be denied to such as do not give the evidences required to manifest the possession of them if they have arrived at a sufficient maturity of age for making a profession.†

* Psalm. 7. 11.

† "In the Lord's supper every believer acts for himself personally; in the sacrament of baptism, when administered to infants, the parent acts as a representative and sponsor for his seed. None, therefore, ought to be admitted to baptism more than the Lord's supper, who have not a credible profession of faith in Christ, and in the judgment of charity or ra-

God himself when he instituted the ordinance of circumcision, gave a specimen of the character of that parent whose children under the gospel might be admitted to baptism: "And he (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised; that he might be the father of all them that believe though they be not circumcised."*

It appears that previous to the circumcision of Abraham he had the righteousness of faith; that this righteousness of faith prepared the way for his circumcision and for being constituted the father of the faithful. Those, then, who claim the right of baptism for their children from the nature of the Abrahamic covenant, ought to possess this righteousness of faith, together with faithful Abraham, previous to the admission of their households to baptism.

ther in the judgment of men may not be supposed real christians. Yet is it not certain that many who are justly excluded from the Lord's table, and some who never asked admission to it, do insist on presenting their children to baptism, and are pleaded for by not a few of better character, who cry out against the refusal as an injury to the child, besides other bad consequences, sometimes pretended. The complaint is, that it is a pity the child should suffer for the fault of the father. This is the very error and prejudice in religion which I think it my duty to oppose. It arises from a remaining degree of Popish superstition, to look upon the sacraments as spells or charms, which have some effect independent of the exercise of faith in the receiver."

"These things, my brethren, which I have mentioned occasionally, I have now repeated and will add to them, that I think there is something very incongruous, at least unsuitable in admitting any parent to present his child in baptism whatever be his character in other respects, who has never asked admission to the Lord's table."

This is part of a sermon preached by doctor Witherspoon, when he was about to leave Britain in obedience to a call from America to be president of the college at Princeton. Vol. 2. p. 535, 537.

* Rom. 4. 11.

That Abraham is called father in allusion to the example of his character, according to which it is proper for those who apply to the church for ordinances to be formed is established from these words: "That he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised."

We find in Genesis the promise made unto Abraham and his seed in this manner: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and they seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee."* This seed must be an appropriate character to the relation which God here acknowledges: he cannot in the endearing manner here expressed be a God unto the wicked; they are the objects of his aversion, and sustain no place in the promises of his grace. In agreement with this sense of the subject, the apostle when explaining this part of the scriptures to the christians of Rome, declares, "That they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."† The children of God are a well known character in Scripture; they are those who have been renovated by his grace and made the subjects of faith. Does it not seem then to be the decided judgment of Paul, that those who are not the visible subjects of grace cannot lay claim to the promises of the covenant, nor yet its privileges from the church?

Christ corrects the false notions of the Jews, who without being possessed of the faith, or observing the righteousness of Abraham in their life claimed a relation to him upon the ground of the covenant. "If ye were the children of Abraham ye would do the works of Abraham."‡ Their relation to Abraham, as their natural father, could not be disclaimed: it was their spiritual relation to him which Christ here refused to recognise, because it could not be said in truth that God was their God and that they were his people.

To the same effect are the following scriptures: "Know ye therefore that they which be of faith, the same are the children of Abraham;"—"If ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."§ The be-

* Gen. 17. 7.

† Rom. 9. 8.

‡ Joh. 8. 39.

§ Gal. 3. 7, 29.

Never is here counted a child of Abraham, whether he be Jew or Gentile, to the exclusion of others. He takes his stand in the church of Christ according to the ancient charter granted to Abraham and his seed. This conclusion is inevitable: if ye be not Christ's then ye are not Abraham's seed, nor heirs according to the promise; of course you and your children are excluded from the ordinance of baptism. Did those persons who thus explain that constitution of which circumcision was a rite set as a court who should be applied to by all who would obtain the circumcision of their children, how would they execute their office? Would they not act consistently with their own commentaries upon the constitution of that society of which Abraham was the head? As an upright court, could they act in any other way, but upon the principles of the institution? Would not this have kept society pure according to the design of it?

The complexion of that profession which was made by those who were received into the christian church by the apostles themselves, leaves no room for an indiscriminate baptism of saint and sinner or the baptism of the children of the one as well as the other. Their history in the Acts of the Apostles represents them to us as conscious of guilt, pricked in their heart from a sense of sin, and enquiring "what they shall do to be saved?" They were directed to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins and they who gladly received the word of this instruction, were baptized; they who cordially complied with the calls of the gospel and rejoiced at a view of salvation by faith in Christ were baptized, exclusive of others who did not thus feel the effects of the word preached. The apostles received them as christians, and they themselves appeared to have the properties of christians: they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship; continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.* This description answers to no others but those who have the spirit and the hopes of christians.

The last verse of this 2nd chapter tells us that the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved; literally the Lord added the saved daily to the church. This participle, *Se-*

* *Act. 2. 27—46.*

somenos (saved) occurs in several places, and seems to have been a common appellation given to those who became professing members in the church of Christ, and is used to the same import with the word regenerated or converted; as in the following: "According to his mercy he saved us;"—"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling?" The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved (*Sodsomenoi*, the saved) it is the power of God.* That salvation of which these scriptures speak, seems already to have taken place; it does not refer to our acquittal at the last day. To whom is the promise made? It is to the saved and to their children.

The story of Philip and the eunuch is to our purpose: "For when they came to a certain water and the eunuch asked what hindered him to be baptized, Philip told him, if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest."† It seems then that believing with all his heart was necessary in order to procure a permission to be baptized: that was the condition upon which it was to be done. Believing with all the heart is as strong an expression as could be used both to signify the act of the judgment and the will in union. The eunuch's mind had full information of the character of Christ and the plan of salvation from the 53d chapter of *Isai*. which he read, aided by the exposition of Philip, who from that scripture preached unto him, Jesus. That belief which carries all the heart with it, has the whole mind centered upon its object; the will, judgment, disposition and affections, are all there: no earthly object however dear can be preferred.

If any should object that the eunuch's answer which is, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God," imports no more than an assent to that proposition, let it be remembered that it is the same kind as Peter's answer to Christ, which is acknowledged by him as a declaration of saving faith in Peter: "Blessed art thou Simon Bar-Jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my father who is in heaven." Whosoever, (says John) shall confess that Jesus is the son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.‡ Multiplicity of words

* 1 *Cor.* 1. 18. 2 *Timoth.* 1. 9. *Tit.* 3. 5.

† *Act.* 8. 36, 37.

‡ *Matt.* 16. 17. 1 *Joh.* 4. 13.

is not the manner of sacred writ. It makes a simple declaration of a capital idea or sentiment, and where there is a necessary assemblage of ideas in connection, it frequently leaves them unexpressed. This is the case in the instance before us : the divine son-ship of Christ is the capital idea in his character. Christ did not give the honor of the faith which Peter professed to the scripture of the Old Testament, nor yet to his own discourses and miracles, but to his father who is in heaven, to some operation of his grace which he chose to employ upon Peter for that purpose.

Another case for illustrating this subject, may be had in the administration of Peter when opening the gospel to the Gentiles. After he observed that Cornelius and a number of other Gentiles, conversed like persons who feared God, and gave evidence of the operations of the Holy Ghost upon their minds, he cried out, " Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we ?" * The reason which seems to be given here why water could not be forbidden is, that they were christians as well as the Jews, who had believed before them ; if they had not given proof of their religion, the apostle would have had no plea in favor of their baptism ; they stood prohibited, and this prohibition holds good with respect to Jew and Gentile : for God is no respecter of persons.

I now present the example of Cornelius, the jailor, and Lydia as patterns for the imitation of all those who wish to offer their children to the church in baptism. What sort of a character do you suppose that believing husband, or wife was, who is spoken of in the first epistle to the Corinthians ? It would be folly to say they were not christians ; they who were a reverse of character are regarded as separate from the church of Christ.

The apostle Peter takes notice of a resemblance in baptism, considered as to its signification to the saving of Noah and his family in the ark by water. † If the subjects of baptism, and those who were saved in the ark, are not to hold a share in this comparison, it might as well have been made with Noah's ra-

* Acts 8. 47.

† 1 P. 3. 21.

ven, as with Noah and the souls who composed his family; but if the account of Noah comes into the comparison, the scripture tells us he was "a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God."* Thus we find that all those professions of religion, or instances of admission to ordinances which are marked with honor and acceptance in the scriptures, were subjects of the special saving grace of God.

The manner in which the churches founded under the conduct of the apostles, are addressed in all the epistolary writings of divine inspiration, is a very conclusive argument that the primitive christians were received to membership upon no other supposition or principle, than, that they were true believers & members of the family of heaven.

Those salutations which style the society saints or holy persons suppose they must have been received to membership in that sense of their profession. Thus you find the Roman and Corinthian churches addressed: "To all that be in Rome beloved of God, called to be saints," or called saints, "unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints."†

Both the epistles to the Thessalonians begin with "Paul and Sylvanus and Timotheus unto the church of the Thessalonians." Of whom this church was composed appears from their being called holy brethren in the close of the first epistle: "I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren."

The sacred penmen wrote to the professors of that age every where in terms most explicit of their love to them as brethren in the Lord and the real existence of their faith, their love and holy obedience, "of their being beloved of God;"—"Renewed in knowledge" after the image of God. We are persuaded, says Paul, better things of you, and things which accompany salvation: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth;—" But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should

* Gen. 6. 9.

† Rom. 1. 7. 1 Cor. 1. 2.

show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."*

When any of these professors become wicked and declined from the faith which they avowed they were noticed as intruders, who had insinuated themselves into the church under a false covert: "There are certain men crept in unawares;"—"ungodly men turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ;"—That because of false brethren unawares brought in: "To whom, says the apostle, we gave place no not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."† If their societies had not been made up of professors who were supposed to be real believers, I cannot imagine how these accurate, rational and inspired writers, could express themselves in the manner which we observe in their writings.

The representation which is given of gospel society in the parable of the good seed and tares, does not admit of a voluntary implantation into it of those who are not the subjects of faith and repentance: "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept his enemy came, and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way."‡ By the kingdom of heaven here as generally in the gospel is meant the church of Christ on earth, the good seed the children of the kingdom, the same with the seed of Abraham to whom were made the promises; the tares, false professors or bad members in the church; the husbandman sowed only good seed, neither Christ nor his servants had any hand in placing bad members in the church, it was an enemy that did it; and it appears the servants were alarmed and disturbed when they saw this growth of tares among the wheat, those suspected persons whose conduct was not straight with the gospel. The disposition of the servants to gather up and take away the tares from among the wheat, farther shews that they did not knowingly admit any bad members into their society: Though the husbandman hindered them from "gathering" up the tares, that does not suppose a blind indulgence

* *Col.* 10. 3. *Hebr.* 6. 9. *Jam.* 1. 18. *1 Pet.* 2. 3.

† *Jude* 4. *Galat.* 2. 4, 5.

‡ *Matt.* 13. 24, 25—29.

and inattention to government; it only supposes a disallowance of persecution, and recommends lenity toward those who have once been taken into the church as christians, least thro' mistake an injury should be done unto the children of the kingdom: "But he said, nay; lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them."

It remains still to be observed, that the persons signified by the tares in this parable, bear such a resemblance to true saints, that they cannot at first be distinguished from them: "They made their way into the church through dissimulation, being taken for the children of God;" it was, "when the blade sprung up, and brought forth fruit that the tares appeared."

AN OBJECTION DISCUSSED.

SOME will say that the infants of the Israelites were circumcised without any regard to the piety or circumcision of the parent's heart; in like manner the infants of unregenerate parents may be baptized.

I before observed that there is a difference betwixt the principle of an institution and the practice of those who may affect to observe it. The principle is invariably the same; but the manner of observing a divine institution may be modified to suit the vain wishes and depraved condition of imperfect man. The Israelites it is evident, were not exempt from the common failures of humankind. Unless it can be made appear that all the posterity of Abraham, were the seed to which the promise would apply, the application of the sign was nothing; it was in their own power; they might do as they pleased. We find at times that they worshiped the gods of the heathen though they wore the sign of the holy covenant of the Lord.

It is admitted, that notwithstanding circumcision signifies purity of heart, and the covenant made with Abraham is of a spiritual nature,* there were a number of promises of a temporal† kind made to the patriarchs, which being affixed to the

* *Rom.* 2. 28, 29.

† *Gen.* 13. 15, 16, 17. *Ch.* 16. 5. 18. 119. 20. *Ch.* 17. 6. 8. *Ch.* 23. 13, 14. *Ch.* 33. 12.

grand promise of the future seed, gave the covenant a temporal aspect, and probably, affected the administration of circumcision.

Lay aside these earthly appendages, and the temporal peculiarities of the Jewish nation; view circumcision as a sign of the covenant of grace in its strict unembarrassed situation, and you have it, in that condition in which we find baptism under the gospel.

Does any person know that God did not require those Israelites whose children were circumcised to have faith, as their father Abraham? Can any one assure us they were accepted with God as the parents of circumcised children without a circumcision heart? Could they dedicate their children to the Lord as is supposed to be done by circumcision unless they had faith to do it? The person who is disposed to answer these questions in the affirmative, would I apprehend be as great a devotee to the Alcoran as his Bible, had he the happiness of living in that country in which the Coran and its author are honored.

God found Abraham faithful, and of course a proper person to be a teacher of the true faith in his own family. This laid a just foundation for entering into the covenant of circumcision with him. When he engaged Abraham in the transaction of the covenant, he did not act as the searcher of hearts, or as the judge, foreseeing the degeneracy of Abraham's posterity from their father's righteousness: God acted in this case as the moral governor of Abraham and his family. The dispensation which the Lord gave him, in the hands of faithful parents such as Abraham, is suited for the formation of the human mind opening in acts of perception and understanding. As a law-giver and moral ruler, and in agreement with the views which in that respect he ought to have, God admitted the children to the sign of the covenant with the faithful parent, because the parent's fidelity to God, and to his own children, were to be relied on, and the means to be employed were just calculated according to the reason of things, or the influence which they should have upon moral beings, to produce that effect upon rational minds, which was the desired object of the great Institutor of this ordinance.

This covenant then in reference to the right of circumcisi-

en was made conditionally, though the condition was not expressed in the institution. The natural children of Abraham forfeited their claim for circumcision, as the sign of the covenant, whenever they stood in the situation of parents themselves, without that faith which enabled Abraham to hold this covenant with God.

It does not appear that God ever countenanced the circumcised without that purity of heart and faith which circumcision signified. If any distinguishing favors were bestowed upon them while regarded as unregenerate, which came to them by any covenant consideration, they must be viewed as the fruits of those promises and covenants which were made at different times, and implied temporal blessings. They were the bounties of heaven to the subjects of them held out in God's promisory predictions.

Very much in confirmation of these views is the following passage from Leviticus : " If then their uncircumcised heart be humbled, and they accept the punishment of their iniquity ; then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember."*

Forgetting in man supposes an neglect of the object forgotten. Those persons with respect to whom God had forgotten his covenant, could not be the proper subjects of the sign of it, while it was thus forgotten. The reason of forgetting this ancient covenant made with Abraham, was the want of circumcision of heart. Should this defect in man be remedied, then God would remember his covenant : the great requisite was circumcision of heart ; without this the expressions of God's covenant regards and attention would never be enjoyed. In the nature of the thing as circumcision is a sign or expression of God's covenant regards, would it not be withheld from those with reference to whom God's covenant was forgotten, and the favorable operations of it suspended ? They were not at that time his people, he turned his back upon them. " Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised."†

* *Lev.* 26. 41. 42.

† *Jerem.* 9. 25.

This is not the friendly, propitious language of the covenant of circumcision. There are some who tell us that Abraham's servants who were many, were circumcised without any distinction, that baptism ought to be administered upon the same plan without regard to the faith and piety of the parents.

Men frequently derive sentiments and rules of conduct from scripture, which the Divine Author of it, never designed to give. The plan proposed may have an existence in the imagination of those who choose to act upon it; but I cannot find it supported in that primary case of household circumcision to which the theorist refers. I will set the passage down for your investigation: "He that is born in thy house, and he who is bought with thy money must needs be circumcised."—"In the self-same day was Abraham circumcised and Ishmael his son. And all the men of his house, born in his house, and bought with money of the strangers, were circumcised with him."*

Here is supposed to be an authority for the baptism of the unbeliever and his household: the whole male family of Abraham must needs be circumcised; not only the issue of his own body, but his servants young and old. Does this prove that the unbeliever's household has a right to baptism? Does it prove that the profane Jew had a right to the circumcision of the males of his house? It proves no such thing. Abraham's household were circumcised upon the consideration of his faith. Must not every other household obtain the privilege of the Abrahamic covenant upon the same ground? This is evident.

The appointment of circumcision to those members of Abraham's family who were not the offspring of his own body teaches us the spiritual nature of the institution. It did not prefigure a mere temporal benefit to be entailed upon the posterity of Abraham: in that case it would be confined to his own issue. An heir and a servant hold different and distinct claims in every family.

When you consider the benefits implied in this ordinance to be of a religious nature, the application of circumcision to

* *Gen.* 17. 13, 26, 27.

those in his family who were not the real children of Abraham, will have an important signification : persons in the capacity of servants born in his house, and minors who were subjected to his faithful tuition, care and direction, will share in spiritual advantages in the same manner with his own children. As to Ishmael who was thirteen years old when he was circumcised, we cannot tell what pretension he made to piety at that time. But it seems expedient for us under the more spiritual dispensation of the gospel, to treat persons upon their own footing, so soon as they have arrived at sufficient maturity of judgment to admit of it.

No doubt much religion prevailed amongst the servants of Abraham : one of his servants whom he sent to procure a wife for Isaac seems to have been eminent for piety : his fidelity to his master, and trust in Divine Providence are very distinguishable through all his conduct. The scriptures are silent with respect to the religion of the rest of Abraham's servants who were the subjects of circumcision : it was not the object of sacred history to give a minute account ; but no man can prove that the adult persons who were in this family did not profess their faith in the God of Abraham previous to their circumcision. Why then should it be presumed ? It is nothing better than profane arrogance in man, to oppose mere hypothesis to that use of a divine institution which naturally results from the meaning which the inspired commentators of the New Testament have established. Those children who were born in the house of this patriarch, might have an interest in the faith of their own parents while the whole family being a part of the general family of the patriarch, might be received to circumcision under his auspices.

That the mind may rest happy after the toil of investigation, it is necessary that it have as clear ideas as possible. We shall for that purpose travel a little farther upon this ground, and take notice, of that " cutting off", which is the punishment of the neglect of circumcision.

" The uncircumcised man-child whose flesh of his fore-skin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people ; he hath broken my covenant."* Cutting off in this case does

* *Gen.* 17. 14.

not seem to mean the removal of the uncircumcised from this state of life : the fact I apprehend will not hold good. That is not the method which God takes with those who neglect or abuse, the institutions of his grace. He spares with a patient hand even those who despise his ordinances, and neglect his institutions : “ He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”*

This “ cutting off”, rather means a removal from the religious fellowship and privileges of the society of God’s people. This is the highest punishment proper to an ecclesiastical law. The want of circumcision proved the party was not obedient to God’s ordinances, and of course he would lay himself liable to be cut off from God’s people.

“ That soul shall be cut off.” The soul is used for the person. So in an other place, the soul that sinneth, it shall die, meaning the person that sinneth.

Though that person is to be cut off from the commonwealth of Israel, he is not to be cut off necessarily from the commonwealth of the world.

Circumcision was not the true ground of an interest in the society of God’s people : those spiritual qualifications which the believer possesses, became the medium of fellowship with the people of God. In the account of God’s word the circumcised are “ cut off”, as well as the uncircumcised whose hearts are not circumcised to the Lord ; and those only who “ do the works of Abraham are the children of Abraham.”

“ He hath broken my covenant :” this cannot be directly applied to the uncircumcised infant : in this case he had done neither good nor evil ; his mind never acted upon the subject by either an act of will or of judgment ; it was impossible then that he was guilty or committed a breach of the covenant by his uncircumcision. The sin was the crime of the parent, and his own afterwards if his heart should not be humbled in faith and repentance, and brought into a subjection to the ordinance.

The truth is, an ungodly heart and life, “ cut off” the par-

* *Matth. 5. 45.*

ent ; and when he had no right to a place among the faithful children of Abraham, his infants had no more right to circumcision than the children of the heathen : remember it is the peculiar right of the faithful. Whether this person should get his infants or household circumcised or not, he still violated God's covenant : for as it is said respecting the Lord's supper, by the abuse of the ordinance, he would bring damnation upon himself, and by the neglect of it he had broken a divine command. This person with his household in this view of the case, and in the reason of the thing, necessarily stood excluded from religious society, or " cut off" from God's people.

A commentator* of acknowledged skill in Biblical criticism, observes that the language of this 14th verse might be rendered thus : " And as for the uncircumcised man-child, (the parent) who shall not circumcise the flesh of his fore-skin, that soul (that parent) shall be cut off." This holds up the true state of the subject : the parent is regarded as the agent and procurer of circumcision to the man-child ; through his default circumcision is not obtained ; he of course then more properly becomes the subject of the cutting off from God's people which was the annexed penalty. The privilege of circumcision, was not obtainable for his children, in this state of the case upon constitutional grounds.

The account which we have of the uncircumcision of all those Israelites, whose parents fell under the displeasure of the God of Abraham for forty years in the wilderness, until all that wicked and faithless generation was cut off, seems to serve so well in confirming our sentiments, I cannot forbear transcribing it in this place. " At that time the Lord said unto Joshua, make thee sharp knives, and circumcise the children of Israel the second time. And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel." " And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise : all the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt."

Now all the people that came out were circumcised ; but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way, as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised. For

* *Pool. in Loco.*

the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord; unto whom the Lord swore that he would not shew unto them, the land which the Lord swore unto their fathers that he would give us.—And their children whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised.”*

The time of this circumcision, was just at the close of the forty years which were assigned for the wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness, on account of their unbelief. They had now crossed the river Jordan, and were about to engage in conquering the Canaanites, that they might take possession of the land according to the charter which the Lord granted unto their fathers.

The Lord ordered the posterity of those unbelievers, who perished in the wilderness to be circumcised; but when the Lord instituted this ordinance, he directed circumcision under a severe penalty to be done on the eighth day. Why the circumcision of those Israelites who were born after their fathers had incurred the divine displeasure, by their murmuring and unbelief, was delayed till their fathers were no more, till they themselves might choose or refuse, is the question?

The cause of their uncircumcision is given in the sixth and seventh verses: what is observed before is mere narration. The general reason which seems to be assigned is that the fathers had disobeyed the voice of the Lord, that God consumed them in the wilderness, and broke off the promise which he had made to Abraham respecting his seed, as they, were only the gross and carnal seed of Abraham: for God pledged his faithfulness in the promise, only to those who would devote themselves to him as his people. Having rejected the fathers & sworn they should never enter into the land which he had promised, they could not be considered any longer in covenant with him. They could not while regarded in that respect, obtain circumcision for their children: their own title was not well enough founded: faith the great requisite was wanting. I think it may be fairly concluded, that God himself had solemnly interdicted the circumcision of all the male children

* *Joshua* 5. 2,—7.

of the faithless Israelites who perished in the wilderness, for the above reasons ; and that accordingly the infants of no profane, or unbelieving parents had a real and covenant right, to the ancient circumcision ; and with rather less grace can we say that the same have a right to baptism under the New Testament.

The reason why we find an interference of the Deity, in the dispensation of ordinances to the Israelites while they were passing from Egypt to the land of Canaan, is, that they were then under a theocracy : God superintended them in a particular manner, and gave direct instructions and warnings to his servants in application to his church, in her existing situation.

The travelling situation of Israel could be no cause why circumcision was forbidden : they remained upwards of a year at a place ; they had an abundance of repose being under no compulsion to cultivate the fields, either for food or raiment. There was more reason in excusing the mothers who bore them, from the inconveniencies, weakness and distress which was incident to their situation especially in a moving condition.

The state of this people when circumcised, was to appearance very precarious ; just in the edge of an enemy's country who were all alarmed, and ready to take any desperate measures for their own security. Nothing but an implicit confidence in God, and an obedience to a divine command could have induced this people, and that magnanimous man who headed them, so far to dispense with common prudence, as to submit at that time to circumcision.

Of this "cutting off" from the privileges of religious society, and the communion of the faithful for disaffection to God we have several examples recorded in sacred scripture : whenever God condescended to interfere by an immediate act of theocracy, and to express his mind upon the case of particular persons, we find the unbeliever and the wicked excluded. Cain was cut off from the family of Adam, and his family separated from the pious family of Seth, among whom the patriarchal church was established. God himself pronounced the sentence : "A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be upon the

earth"—“ Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.”*

Esau is another instance : he was brought up by a pious father who no doubt employed every endeavor to implant in his mind, adoring thoughts of God, and a faith of the invaluable benefits secured in the promises of the covenant ; but Esau was too profane, and too much of an infidel to prize things which required a spiritual comprehension of mind ; and because his brother had a relish for divine things and in this respect seemed to prosper, he, like Cain, formed a design upon his life. † He preferred a morsel of meat, to the favors of divine providence ; God then in the course of his providence excluded him and his family from the blessings of his father, which implied the society of the pious, with all other things secured in the covenant of circumcision.

The ten tribes of Israel who formed a kingdom under Jeroboam, afford another proof of the righteous propriety of cutting off the unbeliever, from the society of God's people.

They worshiped the calves of gold which were set up at Bethel and Dan. They no more visited Jerusalem the place which God appointed for special worship, and for solemn assem-

* Gen. 4. 12, 16.

† *While the testimony of scripture stands, common sense will accede to this account of Esau. Gen. 25. 33, 34. “ He sold his birth right unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and potage of lentiles, and he did eat and drink, and rose up and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birth right.” In reference to the specimen which he gave of the state of his mind Paul says, (Heb. 12. 16.) Lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau who for one morsel of meat sold his birth right. Then he was rejected of the Lord and found no place for a change of God's favorable providence toward Jacob though he sought it with the greatest anxiety. (Verse 17.) He now formed a deliberate purpose of the murder of his brother Jacob : (27. 41, 42.) “ And Esau said in his heart, the days of mourning for my father are at hand, then will I slay my brother Jacob.” And these words of Esau her eldest son were told to Rebekah.*

blies. They rejected the statutes and the covenants which the Lord had granted unto, and made with their fathers.*

So the Lord was angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight; banished them from the land of Canaan a place appointed for the residence of his own people, where he had established the administration of his ordinances. The kingdom of Israel expired in the time Hoshea: it was then Shalmanezzer king of Assyria carried Israel away into his own country, and dispersed them into various distant parts from which we never hear of their return.† Thus because they could not be confined to the true worship of God, and gave themselves up to infidelity, the violation of God's holy covenant, the great body of the posterity of Jacob were stricken off, and blended with the general mass of the world. Judah, a few individuals, the regular priesthood of the tribe of Levi, and a fragment of Benjamin, composed that body in which the church was to be found.

The Lord brought this work of cutting off from his people to much greater perfection in the time of the Apostle Paul: that great master builder takes a comparative view of the Gentile and the Jew, and represents the Gentile saying, "The branches were broken off that I might be grafted in—(he replies) Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith."‡

Ezekiel in treating upon the mystical temple which I believe is universally considered to be a representation of the church of Christ which was then future, has this remarkable passage: "Thus saith the Lord God, O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations, in that ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh—and they have broken my covenant."—"Thus saith the Lord God, No stranger uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary of any stranger that is among the children of Israel."||

* 2 Kings 12. 25,—33. 2 Kings 17. 15.

† 2 Kings 17. 6,—18.

‡ Rom. 12. 19, 20.

|| Ezek. 44. 6, 7. 9.

The Lord had directed the prophet to mark with his eyes and ears the ordinances and the laws of his house. He re- proves the people and Levites for the corruptions of the church. The principal cause of which seems to be the introduction of the uncircumcised in heart into his sanctuary, which means his church. By the introduction of such persons they had broken his covenant. Does not this condemn and reprobate the practice of admitting those who are unacquainted with heart religion into the church by baptism, or in any way administering the privileges of the sanctuary to those strangers, who were among the Israelites without circumcision of heart?

The strangers were those who were not of the stock of Israel and had not been circumcised in their infancy. It seems the introduction of them into the sanctuary without circumcision of heart, or evidence of conversion is counted by the prophet, a violation of the covenant, and a pollution of the church. "No stranger uncircumcised in heart shall enter." This partakes of a preceptive, and prophetic signification. It is a command not to receive such to the communion of the church, and a prediction that they shall not be admitted when the church is under the perfect direction of gospel instruction.

During the continuance of the Levitical priesthood, great darkness and corruption prevailed even with those who enjoyed the living oracles of God: the honor of giving true life, brilliancy and operation to those spiritual principles upon which the church was at first formed, was reserved for the ministry of Christ himself. For this reason he is called the Refiner: "But who may abide the day of his coming? (says the prophet,) And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap. And he shall sit as a refiner, and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and as silver that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness."*

From this description of the Messia, and the effects predicted of his advent, it is natural to suppose, that much was amiss in the commonwealth of Israel, that he would employ his earliest efforts in correcting and reforming, that he would make the proper distinctions betwixt the sacred and profane, the

* *Mala. 3. 2, 3.*

righteous and the wicked, in reference to those ordinances of which the members of his church were to participate.

John the baptist, the harbinger of Christ, opened the new ministry* under the direction of his spirit. The manner in which he acted toward those multitudes who rushed to his baptism, will hold up to view, the principle upon which Christ would have his church to act, in the baptism of those who apply to her at any time.

Those inconsiderate people in all cases claimed the friendship of heaven upon the ground of their natural relation to Abraham ; upon that ground they claimed in a special manner, those things which were most obvious in the stipulation of the Abrahamic covenant. John the Baptist did not deny his baptism, to those persons who came forward in the true spirit of that covenant made with the patriarch, but since wickedness would cut them off from God's people, and forfeit any right which they might have as the true children, or imitators of Abraham's faith and piety ; the Baptist did not hesitate to apprise them of their case, and exclude them from the holy ordinance which he administered. He demanded of them fruits which would correspond with their pretensions of being the people of God. He arrested the very thoughts of their heart : " Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham for our father : I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."† The power of divine grace is as necessary for regenerating you into the likeness of Abraham's character, as it is for renovating the stony heart of the heathen man and the publican. These inanimate stones which lie before you, would sooner be transfigured into living saints, by the power of God for the purpose of his own service, and the enjoyment of his ordinances than ye, while in your sins, would be accepted of him.

" The axe is laid unto the root of the trees ; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down

** It is not meant by this that John the Baptist was constituted a minister of Christ under the gospel dispensation : the fact is Christ himself was inaugurated by the ceremony of baptism into his public ministry, & he instituted no office nor ordinance before.*

† *Matt. 3. 7, 8, 9.*

and cast into the fire." The axe means the righteous sentence of God; this sentence is to be applied in the discipline of the church, so far as we are enabled to discern by the fruit the proper object: observe, "the axe is already laid to the root of the trees." Those fruitless trees which only shade the ground, and have given full proof of their barrenness, must not abide in the vineyard of God. Can any man replant those trees in the vineyard after the word of God has thus removed them? Can any thing short of planting them in the vineyard be meant by baptism?

Again, Christ will thoroughly purge his floor and gather his wheat into the garner: but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.* Would not sacred reasoning apply this to the administration of baptism? Does not the inspired Speaker use it in part with allusion to that ordinance? Was it not his baptism for which, it seems, many disqualified persons applied, that gave occasion to those remarks? Was it not to convince the Pharisees and Sadducees that not only they, but all other persons who lived in wickedness and unbelief, were excluded from the privileges of God's house? The just reasoner must always have a view in his arguments and illustrations to the proposition upon which he starts: John naturally glided into the strain of sentiment which we have quoted in justification of his own conduct toward the Jews in reference to his baptism. It operates nothing against our views, should it be objected that this baptism of John was not the christian baptism, or the baptism with which we are now concerned, that Paul re-baptised some who were baptised by John,† that all John's disciples might with equal propriety be re-baptised, for John himself speaks of Christ as the perfecter of what he was attempting to do; and as John was the forerunner of Christ, so this baptism was the forerunner of the christian baptism. Whatever spirit is here employed in excluding impious persons from the holy ordinance in this instance, will apply with more force to the christian baptism.

A supposed assent of the mind to the truth of divine revelation, and a number of orthodox notions floating in the brain, will never procure a right to this ordinance: this kind of pro-

* *Matt.* 3. 10, 12.

† *Acts* 19. 3—5.

cession stands upon the same ground with the pretensions of those crowds who came to John for baptism, but were stopped short with this salutation: "O generation of vipers! who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come"* The flattering title of professor, or seeker of religion, may be tacked to the garment of any person however profligate; he is not for that consideration to be regarded as a proper subject of religious ordinances.

You will administer baptism to the children of some applicants, or you will baptize themselves, whom you would not receive to the communion of the supper; the least I can say of such conduct is, the mind may have been beguiled into the habit of justifying it by custom, and customs may flow in from carelessness or inattention. Does not baptism lay persons under the same solemn obligations with the sacrament of the supper? Why trifle with one more than the other? If you have not a sufficient evidence in favor of a person's religion, to receive him to the communion of the supper, or to believe him to be a christian, upon what just supposition can he be received to baptism, or where his household are in question, how can they be received through him?

Those parts of the world where the gospel is preached in any manner and approbated by a prevailing number of the inhabitants, are called Christendom; the multitudes who compose this vast christianized animal when reduced to individuals, are called christians in contra-distinction from Pagans. These must needs, indiscriminately, be the subjects of baptism according to the diffusive generosity of some of the good priests and people who join with the general mass in the profession of the christian religion; but I know of no other advantages which such have by their visible profession than that which the cities had where Christ performed his mighty works to whom he said: "Wo unto thee Chorazin! Wo unto thee Bethsaida! It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you." "And thou Capernaum which art exalted to heaven shall be thrust down to hell."†

Those who make it evident by their conduct that they are not directed by the laws of christianity, and that their hearts

* *Matt. 3. 7.*

† *Luke 10. 13—15.*

are not ornamented with the pure faith of the gospel, cannot possibly have a right to membership, in the church of Christ, cannot possibly have a right to baptism: they are those of whom the Apostle says: "they profess that they know God; but in works they deny him. From this description of persons Timothy was directed to turn away.* Could it be consistent with the mind of God to receive into his church by baptism those from whose company he has instructed his servants to absent themselves? I hope no serious man can be so vain as to imagine it.

If we inquire what advantage the children of profane parents have by their baptism, we can think of none; they themselves have never learned Christ and a cordial subjection to his precepts: their children cannot derive from them benefits when their own hearts are not operated upon by those considerations which are implied in baptism. The Apostle in writing to the christians at Rome accounts the chief profit of circumcision as flowing from the oracles of God which were committed to the Jews.† Is it not then a fair deduction, that the great advantage we ought to contemplate in the baptism of children, results to them from the pious tuition, christian example, and instruction of their parents; unless these parents have imbibed the principles of piety themselves, how can they have dispositions for communicating them to their children? Can we congratulate the children as introduced into the school of the faithful, while the persons who are constituted their teachers and guides are themselves the servants of sin?

Alas, an unregenerate parent or guardian cannot be deemed a suitable guide and instructor in the matter of religion: "the carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can it be.‡ If this mind be not subject to the law of God, can any strange exemption be supposed which will impel it, notwithstanding, to perform a religious part in this case? The improbability of such an exemption, concludes as powerfully, and will be equal, in moral reasoning, to a demonstration in the mathematics: the mind will be equally affected by the force of it. The person in question,

* Titus 1. 15. 2 Tim. 3. 6.

† Rom. 11. 2.

‡ Rom 3. 4.

then, is morally incapable of performing that part which is required of the parents of baptized children. Will a wise king, when designing to rear up a set of subjects, who shall be extensively acquainted with his laws, and well affected to his government, constitute the ignorant, the disaffected and rebellious, for the purpose of training them? He undoubtedly will do no such thing.

It may be supposed that what some people call a good moral character might be admitted to the privilege of baptism, that upon the same consideration their households should be baptized likewise. It is easy to suppose a number of fine things; but it is not so easy to make them consistent with the gospel. I cannot find that the scriptures recognize any good moral character distinct from the christian character. If this character is counted moral upon the pure principles of the moral law, distinct from those of the gospel, or of the constitution of grace, the ordinances of the gospel have no reference to it: they refer to the character whose standing is in the gospel plan of salvation; but if the character which is meant, be of an evangelical kind, I would be happy to learn the ingredients which constitute this morality: I can have no idea of that moral sincerity which does not implicate the faith and humility of the christian.*

The scripture has drawn a line of division betwixt the regenerate and the unregenerate: though this line be not the impassable gulph which divides heaven and hell, yet it divides the subjects of two kingdoms from each other whose government is very different. On the one side of this line we find the subjects of the king of Sion; on the other side the subjects of the reign of sin which is the vice-roy of Satan in the hearts of men, and it has obtained a very absolute and extensive domination.

* *It is true we observe a great and a very ostensible difference in the dispositions and endowments of men: whilst the mind of some is brutalized with a certain baseness of disposition, the mind of others is finely furnished by the God of nature with various qualities, which in our intercourse with them produce our pleasure, excite our admiration, command our love, and procure our confidence; but they may be blended with the qualities of a heart which neither fears God, nor delights in the holiness of his law, nor yet has a just apprehension of the turpitude of moral evil.*

The jurisdiction to which they cordially submit, and the laws from which they take direction are quite opposite in their demands.

I shall now dismiss this subject. I hope that no sensible christian who is acquainted with his Bible will be offended at the freedom of my animadversions. I have written for the sole purpose of evolving to public view what I believe to be the truth, the observance of which is necessary for the welfare of society. An attempt to reprove and convert those whose souls are poisoned, and whose conduct is stained with pernicious errors is not an act of enmity. I have no malevolence against my fellow-creatures to gratify; and he must be the weakest of men who would step forward to the view of the public merely for commendation, to whom this fact is known, that the deserving and undeserving have shared alike in the reproaches and the praise of mortals.

FINIS.

